

Setting a mug of piping hot coffee down on the edge of his work-desk, Vragg snapped his rubber safety goggles back on then slid out his stool for him to sit on. Wriggling his fluffy rump onto the seat, the grey and blue-splotched wolf—who was 6’ tall—rattled his claws down onto the work-desk. He peered through vials of bubbly fluids that were neon purple and green and orange, and other colors too. “Right. Where did we leave off,” he said, with some disgruntlement.

Vragg had exited the lab room for a lunch break, thrown sausage and eggs and hash browns into a large pan and fried them then pounded them down with a fork and some sips of water to help him get over his frustration. He regarded how fruitless his attempts to produce the growth serum had been, not just today, but these past seven months.

“Wasting time, resources,” he had after that meal. He would say (and then curse) at least once per week. Seven months ago, he swore that he saw a test rat grow for three seconds before reverting to its original size and dying. He cursed the rat for renewing his hopeless obsession with creating the serum. Otherwise, he would have given up on it two-hundred moons past.

Blinking out of his daydream, Vragg took the coffee mug and chugged it down. The coffee made as much a mess of his chin fur as was already spilled over the work-desk, rivulets of fluids originating from sparkling fields of glass from when his temper had gotten the better of him, pre-break.

He thrust the empty mug down and scowled at the mess. What pulled his iris to the edge of his sight was his microscope. Earlier he put a test sample of his own cells exposed to a failed serum on the microscope for him to examine. Failed, he had branded the serum, because he checked five minutes later and saw not the slightest change. Granted, he seemed impatient on the short-term. But Vragg had mustered patience for over half a year. No longer did he doubt that he was chasing a sea-monster across desert wasteland.

Which is why when Vragg peered into the microscope out of impulse—not expecting a change, since he had last checked before his break—Vragg saw that, yes, there had indeed been a change to his cells—but he believed the sight to be a mirage. The cells had grown?

“Must have bumped the knob,” he mumbled. He reached for his mug—froze, when he recalled drinking the last drop of coffee. His paws needed to grab something, though, now that he was caffeinated beyond hopes of a sound sleep tonight. “Mirage is better than zip. Best I keep my hands busy. More glass will get broken else-wise.”

Vragg busied himself by reproducing the same serum he had written off as a failure—not 100% of him was convinced with that assessment anymore. The fat moon at his window worked off its shyness and crested the night sky: two hours passed in his labor. The wolf raised the steaming orange serum over his nose.

“Cheers.” He downed it as a drunkard would a whiskey bottle.

Although he couldn't promise himself that the mixture wasn't lethal, what difference did it make? As his philosophy on the mirage earlier suggested: results were results; a lack thereof was more depressing than bad ones.

Not confident that the serum would do squat, Vragg then swept up broken glass into a bin. He took his empty mug on the way out, clicking off the lights to finish closing up shop. He retired to bed.

Morning light blared through the window of Vragg's room, making him stretch his arms in a chain-breaking motion. He spread his footpaws off the end of the bed, twiddling the kinks out of them to a yawn, ropes of slather stretching from his canine maw. Some wild idea came to his half-awake mind when he realized his heels were past the mattress: had he grown overnight?

He blink-blinked, then smeared his paw down his face, itching out the sleep in his eyes. “You just adjusted your pillows different, fool. You're just farther down the mattress than usual.”

His voice sounded a tad deeper and more gravelly. Which it always was when he grumbled about in the morning ... right?

“A placebo won’t grow you,” he mumbled, throwing his bedsheets off and his feet to the floor, before a second stretch. “Get back in there and back to work, you tired son of a bitch.”

After some cereal and orange juice Vragg was seated at his work-desk again, mixing vials with confidence renewed after a good night’s rest, as per routine. Several samples of his own cells he exposed to several of what he hoped would turn out to be serums beneath microscope’s lens. His agitation boiled, but he kept a forced grin throughout experimentation. No matter how calm he wished to be, though, his muscles twisted into knots and squeezed, and his paws started shaking, his shoulders rumbling, jaws grinding.

Sweating, Vragg staggered out of his seat, kicking the stool to the cement floor. He hunched over snarling, talons clenching up toward the palms of his paws, rump and chest and face suddenly searing with spasms of heat.

“Wharthsh ... going arghrrn?”

Had he overworked himself to cramps? Exposed himself to a dangerous chemical? A sudden roar shook the work-desk, and the wolf’s pecs rumbled, grunted and shuffled, swelling out to nudge uncomfortably against one another. Crackling and popping sounds ziplined down his spine. A sudden pulse of growth straightened his hunched posture. A gasp of bliss, and the wolf who was previously 6’ grew to 6’2”.

An image of the cells he had observed the night prior flashed in his mind, the cells that grew and multiplied. He

released an indulgent yowl, his body arcing up in size to 6'4". Furry bulk rumbled and pumped out of his thighs, arms, chest, rear and jawline. His growth put his feet into an ungraceful leg-tying dance about the lab room. Every step landed a bigger, beastlier set of claws.

"It's working," he gasped. His body sputtered its way up to 6'6", 6'7".

At 6'8" his growth tapered. That didn't convince Vragg he was done growing. If, truly, he had grown last night, then more sensual spurts that would pump his frame were yet to come. Already he felt the weight of his pecs. It was heavier, as was the sound of his breath.

"Who knows where it'll stop?" wondered Vragg. "Maybe it already has. Maybe. Anyway, I don't fancy cramping myself inside of this lab if I do grow bigger. Let's get out of here, find somewhere more open of space." He dipped his head under the door-frame, which was at exactly the height of his skull but grazed by his ears.

Not long after Vragg left the brick apartment complex where he lived, puzzled stares pinpointed on him as he tread down the crowded steep-sloping city streets, across crosswalks, busy plazas and packed neon-lighted tourist areas. The 6'8" wolf enjoyed the commotion—the murmurs about his heft, and his bulging boxer-briefs: the only article of clothing that fit him now.

“You may enjoy the looks now, but it’s best to keep it low-profile for now,” he murmured to himself. 6’8” struck him as neither normal nor supernatural, size-wise. At 6’8” he still faced vulnerability, and he preferred to not attract too much attention until he had grown large enough to mitigate that vulnerability with size and strength.

He asked himself, “What are you talking about? What could go wrong?”

He chuckled softly. *Many things could*, answered him a thought. Imagery straight from the theatres dazzled his mind: police and military retaliating against a great wolf kaiju; the booms of monstrous roars buckling sirened cars and military tanks; ginormous footpaws squashing the latter into metal pancakes.

Silly shit, Vragg thought. His leave from the city would be safe, underrated. Quietly he would make his way to the forests sloping over and under the hills to the west: two great green masses shaped like ice cream scoops, reaching altitudes hundreds of feet above sea level and separated by dense pine woodlands whose median was marred through by a grassy flatland: plenty of space and privacy for Vragg’s awaiting growth.

Fate had it a wolf itching for a fight loitered around the rundown brick complexes outskirting the city, and sighted Vragg. What made this wolf dangerous was that he fought because he knew damn well he fought with skill. Necromantic,

Vragg thought of the wolf's appearance: it was black fur slashed with tribal markings of venomous green, eyes that glowed the same hue, like two hot coals seen through night vision goggles.

"Growth hormones, if I ever had proof of 'em," called the wolf when Vragg walked a few yards past him. Spoken up had Taj, a 6'-tall wolf. He had room to grow, especially if you fed him magic.

Vragg froze. At first he thought the wolf had said growth potion. Did he? The grey wolf paced quicker, not risking a confrontation.

A spitting sound. "Deafer, too," Taj said. "Hey. Hey, beanstalk."

Vragg had hardly grown. His growth had already brewed trouble for him. *This is why I have trust issues*, he reprimanded the serum mentally, quickening his pace. The sound of footsteps followed Vragg.

"Hey. Do you fight?" After a lack of reply, Taj sprinted to catch up. He jerked Vragg around by the elbow, stared him straight in the eyes and snarled with a smile. "I was talkin' to you, beanstalk. You must not get good reception up there in the clouds."

"What's your deal, hey?" Vragg said, regretting it as soon as the words slipped. How careful he had been to avoid trouble. But trouble homed in on large wolves how piranhas did on fresh blood.

Taj just stared. “Y’know what’s my deal?” Sharp fangs carved a smile. “You’re avoiding me, like I’m not worth your time. Oh, I’m *worth* the time. I can grow too!” The wolf conjured out of thin air an emerald shard of magic, which he popped into his mouth like a multivitamin. The magic reacted with his body, making him spontaneously grow. With an evil hehe the wolf clenched his fists and wagged his tail, grinding his teeth and indulging himself in the sensation of growth as he pushed mass out of his body, the green markings on his fur flaring with super-charged magical energy. Vragg’s eyes widened as the necromantic-looking wolf embiggened himself before his very eyes, bulking up and ticking away at the size-gap between him and him every second. This growth was accompanied by warmth radiating from the black wolf. He went from 8” shorter to 6, 6 to 4, 4 to just 2. Then, Taj pushed out one last burst of size, leveling his gaze with Vragg’s.

Seeming both prideful and humored at the expression of horror on Vragg’s face, Taj said: “Hah, am I worth your time NOW, wolf? How about once I grow even more?”

Taj conjured up into his paw a magical talisman: a necklace from which enchanted werewolf teeth hung. Vragg reckoned allowing the wolf to use the talisman, whatever it was, would prove bad luck for him, so he gave into the other wolf’s bloodthirst: he slammed Taj to the ground. Or, he tried to, anyway.



Vragg had busied himself with creating test serums these past days, not training for a spar. As such, when Taj his adversary came off his toes and lost the talisman from his grasp, he wrapped Vragg in an embrace and barreled over on top, topping Vragg so that when hit ground, Vragg served as Taj's living bed to break the fall.

"Grruoaf, fuck," the grey wolf cursed. The other wolf laughed, scampering up off of his collapsed body. Taj had leeway to dash halfway toward the talisman, though Vragg—a growl rising in his muscly chest—speared his arm out to scrunch the wolf's tail in his grasp, yanking the prickling tail-tip under his opposite elbow. With a blurt of insufferable fury, the other wolf hugged the concrete ahead of him, grumbling weakly yet with the bassy authority of his size.

They both came up at the same time, grappled. Snarling maws snapped at one another, flashing beastly whites and spittle. With werewolf strength Taj flung Vragg back at bullet-speed four yards, then like a wild animal sprung off his hinds, tackling the other into a somersault. On the roll, Vragg yowled and grunted, warding off the weighty other's talons from his face with claw and tooth-snap; then, coming up, feet over head for a second time, Vragg with an awkward kneeing knocked the black-furred wolf off him.

Alas, it was Vragg who landed atop the felled wolf, his back to Taj's belly. So when Taj regained his breath, and eyed that glinting necklace straight ahead, his fires were rekindled, so

he shoved the wolf off him with a brusque pistoning of his palms. He shot his knees toward his core then gunned his footpaws down, vaulting up and skipping off of Vragg's skull midair, leapfrogging with brace-of-the-knees down to the necklace's location. Up he raised the prize—gave a dastardly laugh, such as an Olympian saboteur who had cheated his way to a gold medal.

“Well, you had your chance, ‘big guy,’ ” said Taj above Vragg, whose lilypad-designated skull had been launched to the concrete. The black wolf brought the necklace down, resting its crescent of teeth upon his pecs. Suddenly, a searing heat surged through him: AMPLE growth.

“Hrrmmmmmmmmmmh!”

The necklace, evaporating into neon green, Taj absorbed into his body for its magical energy. He grew yet again. Steam seared off of his fur as he howled with tear-jerking ecstasy, groping at his chest as it inflated with muscle to choruses of sinewy shifts and groans. **“Yesssssss, rrrrh! Fuck YAS dammit!”** The rumbles of miniature avalanches swept his furry frame. Noises of skeletal expansion thundered over Vragg, Taj's shadow steadily yawning over the getting-up subordinate. The wolf Vragg gulped, ears perking and inclining backward with shivers, for he felt the **gggrrrrrrrrrrrrmp, grrrrrrrrrrmp, gggrrrrrrrrnnnnnnh** of the black wolf's frame enlarging. **7', 7'4", 7'8" tall ...** Seemingly done transforming, the black wolf

sighed. Vragg, somewhat relieved, thought his spurt finished there, but Taj said:

“Or should I say ... little guy? Hm hm hmh hm hm **hmmmmmmhhhhh.**”

On that note Taj buckled into another splurge of growth, buttocks expanded, biceps ballooned, chest pumped up, face thickened and body packed on even more mass. All the while he transcended his brief height of 7’8”. Taj greedily milked all the magic out of that necklace and scaled up to 8’, 8’4”, 8’8” tall. Worse yet for Vragg, Taj had another spurt of growth saved up: all he had to do was give a good, goading squeeze of his biceps, and ...

Oh, no. Vragg didn’t simply idle and watch the show unfold. Having bided his time this second spurt, the grey wolf sprinted forward, caught the black wolf on the underside of his jaw with his knuckles. An “Ough” sounded out of Taj’s spitting maw. The big lug dizzily moseyed back for a pair of steps. Again Vragg caught him, but opposite side of the face, across the cheek, then he followed up by dishing out quick jabs to the wolf’s toned gut. Albeit slightly absorbent of the punches with its abdominal padding, it was unguarded. The grey wolf’s fist found a weak spot beneath Taj’s ribcage: dead-center of the torso.

Winded, the large black wolf gathered not the strength to bring his paws up just yet. He played into his own backwards stumbling, accentuating it to create a gap between he and Vragg.

Having done so, he let one leg back, then powered it into Vragg's groin, bellowing, "Kick Ball!"

With a single-worded cry ("Jewels!"), Vragg windmilled to the street, sprawling arm over muzzle beneath Taj's feet. His nethers ached and lower body shuddered in throes of hurt. The black wolf spoke, voice having packed on weight:

"Quite the kick, don't you think?" with a rhetorical flourish of his hands. "And you haven't even seen how big I can get from the energy that necklace gave me! Why don't we ... **ch-change that ...**" Hunching over he squeezed his fists, tail swinging with boiling rage, fangs squeezing and lips reverberating, snarling. **"Grrrrrrggghhhh, rrrrrghh, uuuaaaaghhh!"**

Taj grew, grew, muscles yawning bigger, bones snapping and popping in expansion. Letting loose a yowl of bliss, Taj upgraded from that measly 8'8" to 9'4", 10, then 10'8" tall. Double his previous growth spurts, this one made Vragg only about  $\frac{2}{3}$  Taj's size. Vragg did not blink an eye open to view Taj grow again: was afraid to, frankly.

In real-time the commotion of a crowd began to occur to his wolf ears. *The pulling over of cars. The circling of people.* One eye batted open. Everyone from the elderly to young folk to bicyclists had circled the two gigantic wolves in the street to watch and comment on and film the brawl with their phones. Police sirens sounded distantly, but Vragg doubted that the

police was headed for this neighborhood, or even that they would favor his side of the story.

One shiny bike in particular glinted in Vragg's eye. It was the same glint Taj had had with the necklace. As Taj gasped and snarled in growth behind him, Vragg jumped up, adrenaline pounding. On fores and hinds, he raced toward the ring of crowd people, elbowed a bicyclist, hopped on his bike. Vragg was just barely small enough to pedal. Furious calls of the black wolf, and of the bicyclist, faded behind the walls of people screaming and noodling themselves out of Vragg's wake.

“ ‘Scuse me, coming through!” yelled Vragg. He pounded ruthlessly through the crowd, smartphones flying out of flailing paws. Taj blasted through the crowd after Vragg, on all fours. But Taj found trouble following Vragg once the grey skirted into a narrow alleyway. After dashing down a corner, Taj saw Vragg speed off alongside a road into the woodlands, the grey wolf hopping the stolen bike off of the main road into unpaved forestry. Then Vragg was no easier a find than a haystack needle.

“Don't think I'm through with you yet,” spat Taj. He chased his rival into the eastern forest that circulated around the great, green hills to the north.

It wasn't likely Vragg could stay on bike forever. For one, the rugged, unpaved forest landscape with its gnarly roots and unkempt, curving land wouldn't allow practical use of a bike.

Two, he had been feeling a heat coming on as he rode into the forest murk, and knew it to be another impending splurge of growth.

It came on as a wobble. The wobble knocked him clean off of his bike. “Urf!” Onto an old, peeling tree trunk he fell. “Ouch! Ohh ... this again ...” He scratched his back of leaves and stood. A sudden, sharp twang of heat prompted him to arch his legs. “Ooooh ... yeah, yeah, let’s get it.”

Vragg’s most recent growth spurt dwarfed any that Taj had had. The grey wolf felt a thump, before a mighty BUMP shuddered his body, right before it swelled bigger. “**Arrrrf~**” Mass flooded him. Vragg grew from 6’8” tall to 8’8”, 10’8”, 12’8”, then his rate of growth relaxed until he checkpointed at 14’ tall. The dome of his head thwacked under a low-hanging tree branch.

“OW! Ooh ... I like how big my voice sounds, now.”

Rubbing his head, the wolf noticed the tiny bike at his feet, grinned. Just seconds ago he had ridden that bike. Now, it was childishly sized to Vragg. He kicked it into the dark of the woodlands, chuckling at his new strength. Presently, another pang of growth speared into him. Body vibrating with the force of ten energy drinks, Vragg went big-eyed before getting, once again, *big-guyed*.

**17 ... 20 ... 23’ tall.**

Panting happily, the giant wolf stood against a relatively thin tree-trunk. He glanced around at the low-hanging canopy,

which now brushed against his head, to gather his bearings. He maneuvered head-level through the green canopy until the canopy rose higher, giving him head space. And seeing a doe scamper off in the distance at the sight of him, he said to himself, “That was a doe? ... Looked like a stuffed animal ... adorable.”

How much bigger would he grow? And would he need even more space than this forest? If he could just scour through the woods and make his way to the flatland betwixt the two great hills, he could continue to swell without having to break down the entire ecosystem.

“If you grow large enough, you can’t be sure that you could prevent that,” he pointed out. “But enough hypotheticals. Let’s get clear of these trees before I have to grow through them, and as far away from that guy as I can.”

The dirt trail embedded with the line of the stolen bike melded with the grass of the woods, so Taj’s only lead on where Vragg went was effaced by nature. “Stupid trees. Stupid rocks, and flowers, and allergies,” sniffled the wolf. As he sniffed, he caught a scent. It came from under the root of a tree. False hopes had clued Taj that this was the scent of Vragg, but he realized it was much too feral and stinky.

Physically, Taj had made zip progress this past hour. Spiritually, though, he was picking up a presence. Nearby roamed magical spirits in the woods. A light nipping sensation

against his fur lured him toward the spirits. He followed it, and found the spirits in a grove. They were the forest's protectors, celestial animal spirits: a feral bear, stag and wolf. Of an ethereal, bluish-white substance they were wrought. Why had they gathered?

Amongst them was being performed ... a sacred ritual of some kind? Taj, peeking at the spectacle from the slit of a bush with his paws hanging out, quickly realized the type of ritual from his knowledge of spiritual practises. Dancing along a drawn circle, the animal spirits would occasionally frolic within the circle, dance with a partner then exchange partners. This ritual served as a means of replenishing the protectors' magical powers, so that they could keep balance to the predatory chain and subtly commune with civilization, so as to ward people away from populating the thus far unscathed ecosystem.

For the forest, these animal spirits had proven, time and again, to be saviors. For Taj, these animal spirits would prove, one time and one time only, to be dinner. And what better time for him to find them, than during their recharging session! Spiritual batteries of magic, they appeared to him. Licking his lips, the power-hungry wolf waited till the animals idled and then began to disband. Voraciously he bounded into the fray, with a dark, dark laugh, and inhaled. Screaming, the animal spirits flailed toward the maw of Taj, before, in a vortex of energy, being beckoned forcefully into his gullet, consumed and



sent to his stomach, where their magical bodies would be absorbed to grow bigger. Much bigger.

Belly glowing with the bioluminescent bluish hue of the spirits, Taj snickered evilly. The glow's hue changed into the neon green hue of his body, pulsating over his belly and tapering. Soon the wolf felt a punch land in his abdomen. Roaring deeply, he clutched his side and capered forward. He walked with hunched-back while his traps began to quaver, bulge and bulk up. Groans sounded out of his evolving musculature.

**Roooooaaaaaaaauuuuh.**

**Hah hahah hah hah hah!**

First he surged from 10'8" to 14'8" tall. The heat of change rocketed through his chest and arms, volleying him with pleasure. He let out a deep "Arf" of joy. Yet, compared with what was to come, this was a puny growth spurt. Suddenly, Taj soared up to 18, 22, 26, 30' tall.

The shaggy tops of the forest wobbled and shook. Something beneath them stockpiled pressure, the way the hot liquids beneath a geyser do. The tops of the trees grew terribly shaky until, up out of the forest, reverberated another **Ruuooooooooooooaaar!** that coincided with the expansion of canine-frame: the ascension of Taj from mere mortal size into demigod territory. He climbed and climbed, him and his hulking build, up to the size of 34, 38, 42, 46, 50' tall.

**"I AM COMING FOR YOU, LITTLE ONE."**

So huge, yet so far away sounded the voice of Taj in Vragg's ears, the grey wolf swore he imagined it. "Surely I'm losing my wits?" He chuckled nervously. He got so caught up in his thoughts, he tripped off a stone ledge and with a plunging cry went barreling down a steep slope, gathering leaves on his fur with every bump and thud of the rolling. "Oof, arf, owf!" Tops of trees shuddered in a downwards, pinballing fashion along the forested slope. Out of the forestry he emerged, tumbling onto flatland. When he got up he saw he had reached the grasslands betwixt the great northern hills, making him vulnerable. But now he had ample room to grow. By the time he and Taj met again (if they did), Vragg would be leagues larger than the black wolf, yea?

"WHY, HELLO."

Whipping around, Vragg yapped at his foe. The countenance of the rival wolf shrugged his paws through trees, peeked down at Vragg, grinned grimly. His neon green eyes blazing with malice. Since when had that necromantic-looking bloodhound grown over twice Vragg's size?

50' tall compared with Vragg's measly 23' of height, Taj loomed over the grey wolf as does a father over son. He took his time stomping into the flatland toward the smaller wolf, intimidating him. Meeping, Vragg turned away to flee. Taj transitioned into a full-fledged gallop, with thunderous feudal-roar included. Eeping, Vragg pirouetted away from a

huge paw that lunged at him. He sprinted north up the length of the flatland. The wolf chasing him stayed on all-fours, so Vragg fell onto his to stay ahead.

Still Taj gained on him. Preparing to pounce on Vragg, he flinched and stopped when Vragg abruptly braked, the grey wolf's head flopping against Taj's loins.

With a bright blush, Vragg mumbled, "Uhh, on second thought, I might not need to run~"

The grey wolf buckled down on his knees, suddenly skipping about as if on a hot grille, as his body steamed with growth. "Aghk! Aghhh! Oughhh! Urf, shit, here comes the size!" he laughed with deepening voice. A seizure of growth swelled him even huger, not just to 33' tall, nor 43, nor 53, but 63' tall. Taj blanched with fear as he gazed up at the huffing wolf post-growth.

One of Vragg's eyes sparkled on Taj. "Did you say something, little guy? Can't tell. The reception's bad up here in the clouds." Vragg winked.

A bellow of laughter breezed Taj's upset face. The black yelled, "I just outgrew you! You're making a travesty of my achievement! You DARE?"

"The only thing I dare is, you swing your best punch at me." With a wink Vragg pecked a talon at one of his nipples. "Right here, yeah?" Taj hesitated, then Vragg continued: "What? Afraid your fist'll bounce off? Hahah!"

Fuming from the ears, the black wolf chomped his fangs. He skipped backward, jabbed back an elbow and made a powering-up growl in his throat for dramatization. Jouncing forward, he released a roar the same time he released a fist of fury: “Hrrrrroah!”

Of course, Vragg was no idiot. Instead of letting Taj land his blow, he capitalized on the black wolf’s anger with a strategic calm: he reached out, jerked Taj by the fist into an arcing motion of his body, and, gaining momentum, swung the black wolf off the ground and hammered him down onto his arse.

“Bark!” trumpeted a bark of anger. Snarls of aftershock came after it, then the black wolf cursed the bruises on his ass and knees. “That’s the dirty game you’ll play with me, then? You haven’t an inkling of an idea of my honest power, fool. You’ll see.”

The black wolf started to rise up. The charitable Vragg helped him up the rest of the way by taking his paws and heaving him up over his own head, again, before flinging him down on the flatland. The marred earth cracked open, dust and shrubbery flying. The black wolf skidded back, rolling like a stone, then tumbled into a deep ditch. The ditch was deep because it had been dug. Several bodies of powerful magicians were preserved beneath the earth bottoming the ditch, the spirits of the bodies still shelled inside of them. Taj not only deepened the ditch but unearthed the mother-load of spirit-laden

sarcophagi. Smelling power, the black wolf looked under his rump and saw all of the sarcophagi, eyes lighting up like fireworks. He wasted no time prying them open. When Vragg realized what his rival had happened upon, he barked under his breath, pranced on all fours towards Taj, but he was too late. Taj had unlidded every single sarcophagi. The spirits of the potent mages were his to absorb.

Deeply inhaling, Taj sucked in the spirits of those who were buried, cackling as his downed form bursts larger with ... **growth**. Roaring, he ripped wide his arms as he jumped to his feet, hurling the other wolf away. Vragg staggered back, made audience to the expanding, swelling, embiggening wolf ahead of him.

“H-here c-c-comes my c-comeback!” snarled giddily Taj. The neon green rivers along his body cascaded with potent energy of the absorbed magicians. Up to 60, 80, 100 then 120’ tall he grew!

Little Vragg, little pipsqueak. He was no more than half Taj’s size already. Yet Taj deigned not to stop growing. He continued to surge, and new ropes of sinew formed and tightened beneath his swelling pecs, biceps, abs, thighs and glutes. Way up, up to 140, 160 then 180’ tall he grew. Groaning and whining, he flexed downward, muscles popping and creaaaaking. “MORE, MORE, MORE, AUGGGGH~” vociferated Taj. His body spilled out enough mass to expand him to 200, 220, 240’ tall.

Vragg, the meager vermin. Not much greater than  $\frac{1}{4}$  Taj's size stood the grey wolf now. With a maniacal boom of laugh, Taj chased after the wolf, who panicked and fled those giant calves. He tried to flee into the tall grass that was the outskirts of the western forest. Taj had other plans. He snatched him up by the nape. "Ohh no you don't. Bide your time to grow again on me? I ... think ... not."

And toss Vragg down to the ground he did. And, stooping down to his knees, launch his fists at Vragg's chest he did. He played the grey wolf's chest like a bongo-set, beating him until he imagined the other would cry out, "Uncle!"; and when that did not happen, he beat him within an inch of unconsciousness. Switching off to pounding Vragg's face, Taj played an applaudable boom-boom-boom beat over the earth using Vragg's body.

Taj spat, "Say surrender, damn you!"

"C-can't ..." groaned Vragg.

Had he tested serums for so many months, only to give up after a couple of minutes, or maybe less, of being someone's punching bag?

"Say 'Uncle, Taj! You're the stronger!' "

Vragg shook his head. He felt the hot sensation welling up in his body once again. A grin crept across his face, peppered with malice.

*"Uncle this."*

“What?” Taj shirked away, offset by the strange comment. Suddenly, the wolf  $\frac{1}{4}$  of his size beneath him began to quake. His whole body did. And steam. It steamed hot steam. “No, but you just grew? How could you, when the rate of your growth ...”

“Keeps going up,” Vragg finished, placing a talon on the lips of Taj to hush him. Vragg stared the other directly in the eyes, fires blazing in his own. Taj gasped, then doubled his efforts. He clobbered Vragg’s face harder than ever before. But the wolf’s face being clobbered never broke eye contact, and the wolf only kept growing. He grew up, first from 63’ tall to 103; from 103’ tall to 143’. As he steadily grew, the wolf underneath Taj heaved against the black wolf’s torso and, with effort (he was 183’ tall now), chunked him off just as he surged to 223’ tall, succeeding Taj in size. Did Vragg stop there? Don’t bet your horses on it.

Vragg’s body, when put under stress, had been obliged to grow the quicker. Under all this stress, he grew as he did never before. From 223’ tall to 300; from 300 to 400’ tall. Little Taj formed an O-shape with his mouth, quietly whimpering in light of Vragg’s stupendous growth capacity.

**500’ tall ...**

**600’ tall ...**

The trees of the surrounding forests turned into toy-pieces, for Vragg. Taj turned into the relative size of a dog for Vragg. With a “Yap” of terror did Taj spring away, prancing for the

trees, but a swelling hand grabbed him by the tail, and yanked him back.

“Nuh uh uh,” quaked a leviathan voice ...

**800’ tall ...**

**1,000’ tall ...**

Vragg’s claws began elongating so much, they mowed into the outskirts of the western forest, mowing down trees, combing back the flora and fauna. Up he dangled the black wolf by the nape of the neck, sniggering, whilst the wolf was reduced to the size of a pitiful pup.

“Please,” whimpered Taj, but Vragg just hummed in satisfaction to his begging, growing more.

**1,300’ tall ...**

**1,600’ tall ...**

The hills alongside Vragg, now, looked like little league pitcher mounds. How abundantly he had grown, within a pawful of pulses. “You’re so small, I could crush you beneath mine pawpads, little one,” was uttered a powerful gale of breath from snarling lips against the black wolf’s pallid face. Giant’s teeth carved an awful grin. “Maybe we should test this theory, for all the trouble you’ve given me, mm?”

Vragg’s body still desired to expand its mass: to make the grey wolf exponentially more big than Taj was, despite all the fruitful gains he had already had. As Vragg’s groaning figure met the **1900’-tall** mark, he knelt, and his goliath paw placed Taj below his foot, where the tiny rival would be crushed.



Twiddling his humongous talons, down smiled Vragg at Taj then let the sole of his foot descend, shadowing, overcasting in Taj's eyes the entire sky.

Taj now had to evacuate the vessel he occupied, this wolf body. He had to in order to preserve his spirit. Wordlessly forfeiting, Taj closed his eyes, crossed his arms, clutched his paws to shoulders before the foot came down. Before the boom of the god-sized Vragg, neon energy sparked and, like several solar-flares, erupted through the crack between two of Vragg's toes.

Up whisked the wisping green soul of Taj. Taj fled Vragg, soared high over the flatlands. Over treetops of the eastern woods he gusted southwind, toward the city. Vragg noticed not of his escape. All he knew was that, when he lifted his foot, the body that had been inhabited by Taj evaporated.

His foe may have been done, but Vragg wasn't done growing. He grinned, posturing to squeeze out one final helping of growth.

**“Hng-mrrrgh~!”**

Into the city, where people flourished and magical-connected hosts showed themselves oft to him, Taj's spirit flew. He levitated one story over the residential streets, floating past the windows of broken-down brick complexes, scenting with his nose and spiritual-sense. He found a strong smell billowing from one neoclassical window. In Taj went.

Within a messy room, a fan set on high was whipping, making posters that advertised college field trips for travelling abroad shiver along the sky blue walls. Adjacent a disheveled desk, spirit Taj saw, lying sprawled in uncomfortable posture along a futon with a hoard of textbooks and disorganized notes, a fox in his twenties. He smelled of magic. Taj knew not why but sought to find out. When the fox drew in a sigh of exasperation, pencilling in homework ever the harder, Taj tunneled down his esophagus, cozying himself inside his new vessel.

Green eyes flashed. The window flashed green.

A stutter of the body. “Yi-yap!”

The fox blinked neon green eyes. The fox put down his pencil delicately, considered his hands. Green markings seared out of the fox’s fur. Moaning, he wagged his fox tail in narrow swishes, said: “There we go ... that’s it, give yourself all up to me, little foxie.” He gasped, and hitched upright, chuckling maniacally to the end of the searing sensation. “Landon, is it?”

Buried beneath notes on his desk, a cell phone rumbled.

“Huh?”

Taj checked his phone, frisked the knowledge of the password out of his host with a few twitches and head-shakes. 1-3-8-9. A text from Prof. Hayman read:

*Evening, Landon,*

*Checking to confirm that you'll be attending another field trip to the Ghouli Ruins of Samen with us, September 4th. If so, remember: class will meet on the west wing for the bus @ 9:30 AM. Bring coffee. ;)*

*Hayman*

Taj blinked up from the tiny screen, pondered: *What kind of professor winkie faces their students? Is my fox gay? Maybe I'm out of the loop of how colleges nowadays work.* Remembering the part about Ghouli Ruins made him shudder with glee. *The ruins where the spirits of old Samen magicians are said to be encased in coffins for eternity.* Taj laughed. *Until I greet them, that is.*

He replied, not knowing how to indent or paragraph break with a phone:

*Hayman, of course! Looking forward to the trip. - Landon*

Weeks later, upon arriving at the ruins, Taj entered the Ghouli Ruins, slyly separated himself from his professor's group and weaseled himself deep into the vaults where the spirits of old magicians rested.

Of course, Taj had heard the news reports of a wolf who had grown to over **3000' tall**, surpassing the height of Mt. Farenheit. Though, Taj concluded, his growth had finally worn

off. That meant Taj had plenty of time to catch up before Vragg discovered a means of growing even bigger. Plenty of time to absorb the thousands of spirits resting in the dilapidated ruins of this majestic sandstone city.